

Summary

The fundamental aim of this book was to seek an answer to the following two questions: (1) what is the essence and the specificity of the Nordic model of the welfare state, i.e. the one characteristic of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden?; (2) what did the process of modernisation of this model and the changes in the four selected public policies of Scandinavian countries introduced in the 1990s and in the first decade of the present century consist in?

The major conclusions drawn from the analyses and discussions included in the book can be stated as follows: firstly, there is a specific Nordic model of the welfare state and a development path characteristic of Scandinavian countries; secondly, the Nordic model of a welfare state, which has been subject to various changes and modifications since 1990, has retained not only its original specificity and autonomy but also multiple assets and competitive advantages; thirdly, it is advisable and possible to borrow and adapt the patterns of development, modernisation and social policy that are characteristic of the Nordic model in the conditions of other countries.

The need to make a significant renewal or reform of the traditional Scandinavian variety of welfare state – which was finally shaped in the 1950s and the 1960s – was manifested in the 1980s. The necessity arose to adjust it to the new considerations and challenges so that these countries could maintain or even improve their high economic effectiveness and international competitiveness, simultaneously retaining the major pillars of the system to date which ensured a high level of cohesion and solidarity to Scandinavian societies. For instance, in the 1990s first Carl Bildt's conservative government and

subsequently Goeran Persson's social democratic government introduced numerous reforms in Sweden. They made the necessary cuts in public expenses, developed an active labour market policy by eliminating high unemployment rate and soon transforming the budget deficit into a surplus. They made the social security system more flexible by providing people with a greater freedom of choice when taking advantage of educational or healthcare services. A pension system reform was also implemented, which is frequently considered exemplary elsewhere. A significant progress in popularising preschool care and gender equality was made. At the same time the economy was liberalised by, among others, deregulating the banking, telecommunications and energy markets.

The Nordic countries' experiences of recovery from the serious economic crisis of the early 1990s indicate that the successful "turning around" was an effect of using specific methods and recipes for introducing the desired reforms, which turned out to be highly effective, rather than assuming extremely original strategic directions for changes by them. This involved, among others, ensuring the necessary balance between the interests of the crucial social groups, between various economic sectors and between areas of political activities. This also involved the more general *modus operandi*, the technology itself of arriving at new solutions – the relevant articulation of needs, the skilful reaching of compromises, the learning process concerning people and institutions with the application of the trial, error and adjustment method. It is largely owing to these methodical advantages of the adaptive process that the Scandinavians, especially the Finnish and Swedish, who were particularly crisis-stricken, managed to quickly overcome it and proceed to the modernised quicker development path at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries.

Hence, the conducted analysis points at a high potential and adaptive capabilities of the Nordic model, manifested in the processes of adjusting to the arising crises and new considerations. Some call it a high quality of crisis management, a perfected skill of carrying out the necessary reforms at a relevant time. What can be referred to at the same time is the significant axiological and institutional continuity of

the solutions employed by the Scandinavian states as part of the public policies pursued by them. Obviously, individual institutions were subject to certain indispensable changes in order to effectively fulfil additional functions arising from new development needs and social expectations. However, the systemic permanence of the Nordic model was ensured by the maintenance of the principles of social order and political mechanisms presented in more detail in chapter VI – constructive destruction, public management of social risks, community individualism, consensual democracy, well-balanced relations of the state with the market. At any rate, the thesis about the “end of the history” of the Nordic welfare state often presented in the academic and political discourse was not confirmed in the book.

The evolution of the Scandinavian development model in the period after 1990 was illustrated against a broader background of convergent and divergent tendencies in the European social policy. The possibilities to apply the Nordic reform experiences in other countries also remained within sight. A range of the observations and conclusions made in the book may serve, among others, as recommendations for the Polish social policy. For instance, a fuller transfer of Scandinavian solutions such as the Danish flexicurity concept in the labour market policy, the Swedish family-friendly policy model, the Norwegian patterns of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, or the Finnish educational policy and innovation strategy, could have a significant practical and application value.